

Special Interest

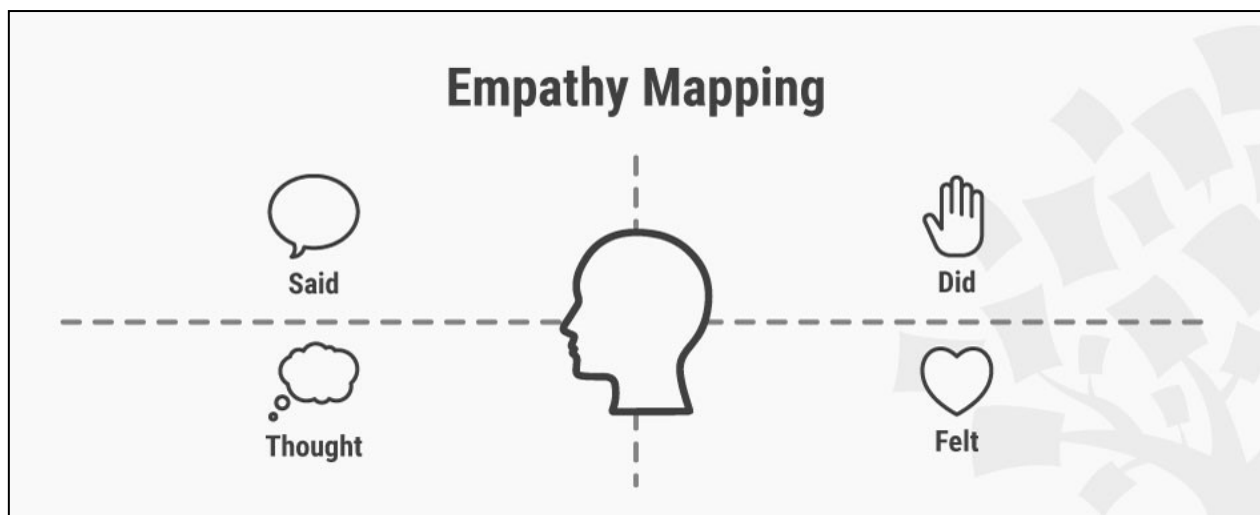
Empathy Mapping in Social Studies

by Scott Petri, Ed.D.

Most Social Studies teachers in California will start off the new school year with remote (distance learning or distance learning or a hybrid model. Since leaving our students at the onset of the COVID pandemic last spring, teachers and entire communities have suffered great emotional trauma. The new school year is an opportunity to prioritize Social Emotional Learning over standards-based learning instead of buying into the fear that we need students to “catch up” academically. As teachers, We can assist the needs of our students to attend to their healing. Empathy maps are a perspective-taking tool that helps students address their mental

health needs.

Empathy maps are widely used to help a group engage in creative problem solving. Although they are chiefly employed in the field of [Design Thinking](#), empathy maps can be adapted to help students think critically about their academic work. Creating an empathy map in Social Studies allows students to detail what they know and think is important about a historical figure. An empathy map provides four major areas to focus attention on: 1) what the person said, 2) what the person did, 3) what the person thought, and 4) what the person felt.



Graphic from [Interactive Design Foundation](#)

For empathy maps to be an effective learning tool, they must provide a well-rounded view of a historical actor's experience. This requires that students [summarize/paraphrase](#) historical details, [contextualize](#) the time period, [source](#) documents both primary and secondary prior to using them as evidence, and apply social emotional learning [competencies](#) into their analysis.

Empathy Mapping strongly aligns with the Social Awareness competency in Social Emotional Learning. [Empatico](#) believes that educators can create experiences that help students exercise their ability to empathize with other people. Students who have high levels of [Social Awareness](#) demonstrate proficiency in perspective-taking, appreciating diversity, and showing respect for others. The [three types of empathy](#) can be thought of as three branches: cognitive empathy, emotional empathy, and compassionate empathy. Each type of empathy can be practiced, developed, and strengthened with role-playing and simulations.

The author of [Humanizing the Classroom](#), Kristin [Stuart Valdez](#) advises teachers to break empathy down into separate components and activities for their students. Cognitive empathy is about intellectually understanding another's challenge. Emotional empathy is about identifying the emotions they might feel. Compassionate empathy is about identifying action you could take to share

their burden.

As a World History teacher, I have always believed that I am also an Ethnic Studies teacher. As Los Angeles' poet laureate [Luis Rodriguez](#) said, "Ideas of racial/cultural purity or superiority are... oppressive,

non-biological, and unnatural concepts, pushed on us like other lies and illusions in our society." Although we are all citizens of the world and our pride requires us to celebrate and honor the contributions of our ancestors, we still need to uphold the ideals that all men (and women) are created equal and not deny others the rights, respect,

and dignity they are entitled to as human beings.

Empathy mapping can help History students understand the concept of [cultural competency](#), defined as the ability to understand, communicate with and effectively interact with people across cultures. The study of History builds cultural competence by helping students gain knowledge of different cultural practices, [become aware realize of](#) their world view, and develop positive attitudes about cultural differences.

It is important to be balanced when assigning students historical figures and events to create empathy maps for. The California FAIR Act [added](#) added language to [Education Code Section 51204.5](#), which prescribes the inclusion of the contributions of

SOCIAL AWARENESS

The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The ability to understand social and ethical norms for behavior and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.

- PERSPECTIVE-TAKING
- EMPATHY
- APPRECIATING DIVERSITY
- RESPECT FOR OTHERS

[Graphic](#) from CASEL Core Competencies

various groups in the history of California and the United States.

This section already included men and women and numerous ethnic groups; the expanded language now includes (additions bolded):“...a study of the role and contributions of both men and women, Native Americans, African Americans, Mexican **Americans**, Asian **Americans**, Pacific Islanders, **European Americans**, **lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Americans**, **persons with disabilities**, and members of other ethnic **and cultural** groups, to the economic, political, and social development of California and the United States of America, with particular emphasis on portraying the role of these groups in contemporary society.”

Procedure for Creating Empathy Maps

After identifying historical actors and/or time periods, creating an empathy map should be a cooperative learning or group activity that follows four steps.

1. What did the historical figure SAY? Write down significant quotes and keywords that the figure said.
2. What did the historical figure DO? Describe which actions and behaviors you noticed or insert pictures or drawings.
3. What did the historical figure THINK? Dig deeper. What do you think that your person might be thinking? What are their motivations, their goals, their needs, their desires? What does this tell you about his or her beliefs?
4. How did the historical figure FEEL? What emotions might your person be feeling? Take

subtle cues like body language and their choice of words and tone of voice into account.

Some scenarios for high school students to use for empathy mapping purposes are:

- Blanca Trueba, the daughter of a wealthy capitalist who has an affair with Pedro Tercero the communist symbol of the Chilean revolution in Isabel Allende’s fictional *The House of the Spirits*.
- Fred Korematsu, a US citizen of Japanese descent who underwent plastic surgery on his eyelids in an unsuccessful attempt to pass as White and avoid Executive Order 9066 (internment).
- Dr. Robert Oppenheimer, a Jewish scientist rumored to be a communist takes charge of the Manhattan Project to build an atomic bomb and is faced with dissenting scientists that oppose using their creation.
- Sgt. [Sergeant](#) Isaac Woodard, an African-American serviceman on his way home from the Army after being discharged after WWII. He was blinded by a police chief for disrespecting a bus driver. This crime led President Harry S. Truman to sign Executive Order 9981, which integrated the American military and ended the Jim Crow era.
- Gabriel Navarete, A Captain in the US Army who was denied service at a hamburger restaurant during basic training in

WWII. When the base commander ordered all of his soldiers to stop patronizing the restaurant, the owner agreed to serve Latino soldiers.

- Inez Burns, a San Francisco clinician who was born in the slums yet becomes one of the richest women in California by performing the safest, most hygienic abortions available until Attorney General, Pat Brown arrests her to lift his political career.
- Myrlie Evers, the wife of Civil Rights leader Medgar Evers who was assassinated in the driveway of the family home, deciding to move her children from Jackson, Mississippi to Claremont, California.
- Bayard Rustin, a communist, homosexual, and draft dodger who becomes a founder of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and advisor to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
- Dr. John Rock, a Roman Catholic obstetrician believed in the power of birth control to stem poverty and prevent medical problems associated with pregnancy. After the Pill received FDA approval in 1960, he launched a one-man campaign to gain Vatican approval.

Have fun creating a library of history's heroes and villains for each unit of study your students encounter.

Students can present their empathy maps as posters to the class, or as a gallery walk where students travel from station to

station.

See [Template](#) from Gamestorming (end of article)

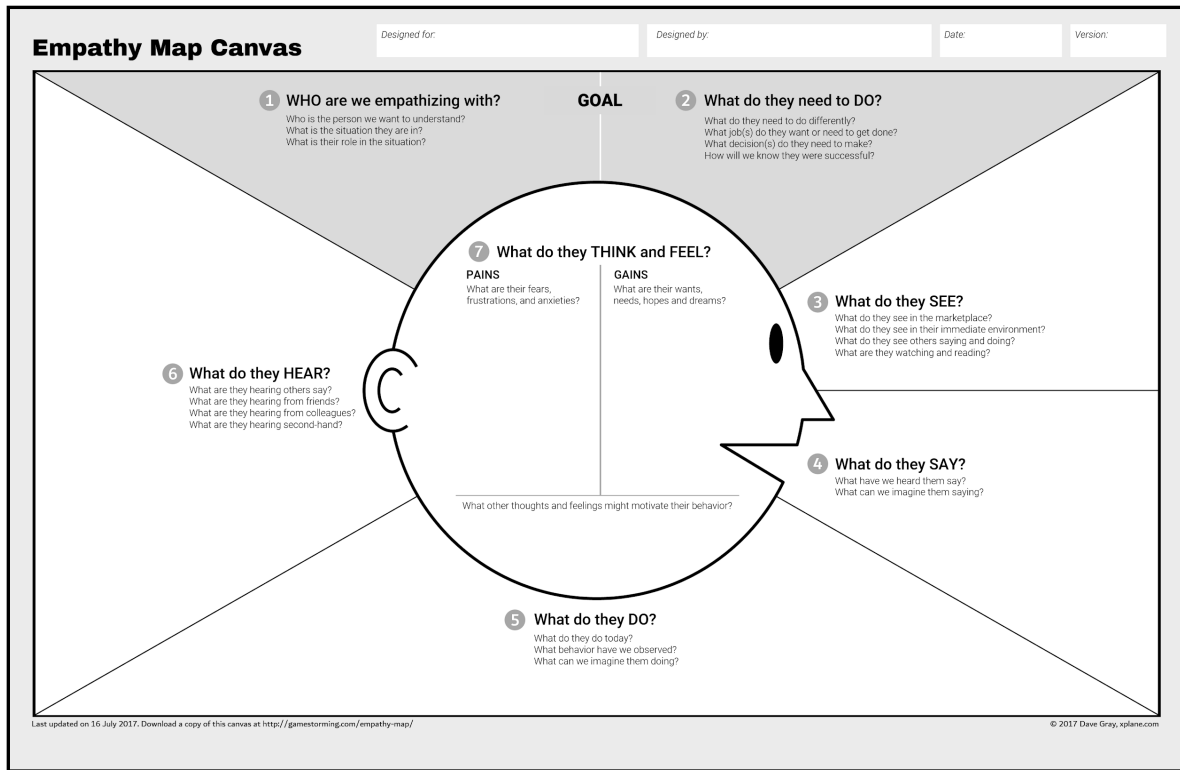
Conclusion

Colby (2008) defines historical empathy as the ability to enter the foreign world of the past... and to demonstrate in-depth understandings of its realities. Bartow (2015) wrote "When one studies the past, it is meant to be a deeply introspective experience. The goal is to enter into conversation with historical figures, to understand their world as fully as we can, to learn from them, and to let them challenge our worldviews." This [approach](#) addresses the phenomenon of "historical presentism" as the application of contemporary moral judgments or worldviews to the past. Meaning history students should understand, but not excuse, the predominant moral values of the times. The purpose of historical empathy is to enable students to "transcend the boundaries of presentism by developing rich understandings of the past from multiple viewpoints, particularly those of the historical agents" (p. 62). By collaborating on empathy maps, history students can gain complex, evolving, and nuanced perspectives on the historical figure under study.

When created in a meaningful fashion, empathy maps help students develop a deeper understanding of historical figures and themselves. When combined with questioning, secondary source analysis, primary document interrogation, and student inquiry projects, empathy maps reveal misconceptions in

historical thinking that can be addressed by a teacher before the error is repeated in a paper

or a larger project and carried on by the student into future historical study.

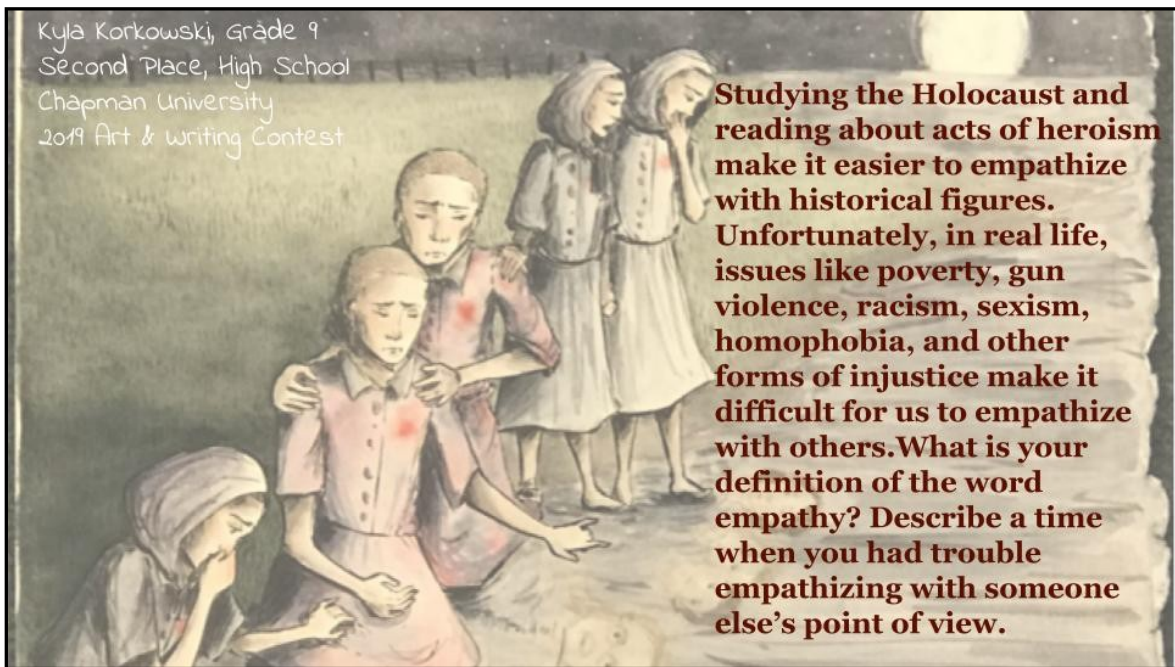


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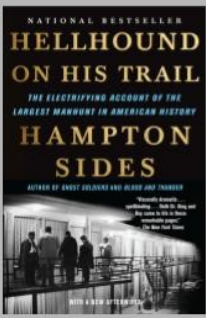
More Examples and Applications

Quickwrites and exit tickets can help students articulate and practice empathy with historical figures. This prompt helped my World History students process the work they did with Holocaust survivor testimonies.



An additional US History prompt was designed to help students empathize with MLK's [Gethsemane moment](#) after the Memphis Sanitation Workers' Strike. It asks students to describe a time when they felt that all was lost. Further, they explain how they picked themselves up and responded to the challenge, elaborating on who/what motivated you to improve?

The replies that I received about students experiencing homelessness, illness, and other personal tragedies touched my heart and reminded me that students need to receive empathy from their teachers. Ms. Stuart Valdes' deeper approach would incorporate all three types of empathy as follows: Cognitive Empathy: Identify and describe a time in your life when people you counted on were unreliable. How was this moment similar to Dr. King's Gethsemane moment? How was it different? Emotional empathy: Using your similar experiences as a guide, can you imagine and describe what Dr. King might have felt? Compassionate empathy: What actions could others have taken to help Dr. King? What actions would you have taken if you were there? These exercises may culminate in role plays to deepen student learning.



MLK suffers a defeat when the Memphis sanitation workers' march turns into a riot (103-108). He turns on his staff and accuses them of being so interested in their own pet projects that they can't focus on what the (SCLC) organization is supposed to do (121-124). Because his staff had never seen him so upset before, they all put aside their personal agendas and commit to returning to Memphis and planning the Poor People's March. This is called the "all is lost" or Gethsemane moment, a period of private doubt and soul-searching.

These examples give students opportunities to connect with a historical figure from the past. They are good starts to improving your students' Social Awareness, however, empathy mapping is a more comprehensive effort that addresses historical empathy and presentism.